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SUBJECT: POLISH PRESIDENT'S MEETINGS WITH UKRAINIAN, GERMAN
COUNTERPARTS

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary Curtin, reasons 1.4b,d

11. (C) Summary: The Ukrainian and German presidents paid reciprocal visits to Polish President Lech Kaczynski in mid-May, marking the importance of those bilateral relationships and the slow warming of personal contacts between the apprehensive Polish leader and his colleagues next door. With Yushchenko, Kaczynski discussed regional cooperation, energy, and domestic politics, and offered a gesture of reconciliation for World War II-era atrocities (in this case, those committed by Polish forces). Kaczynski and German President Koehler closed out a commemorative Polish-German year and continued their discussions on the Baltic gas pipeline and other bilateral concerns (Koehler appeared to make an extra effort to win over his Polish host, reportedly offering to defend Poland against charges of anti-Semitism and intolerance because of the new governing coalition). Kaczynski's staff remarked on the president's deep satisfaction with the recent Vilnius conference and his meeting with Vice President Cheney, which informed his exchanges with Yushchenko and Koehler. Presidential staff and MFA officials also noted separately Kaczynski's determination to assert complete control over Polish foreign policy. End summary.

12. (C) Presidential Chancellery International Affairs Director Mariusz Handzlik characterized both visits as a further step in his new president's familiarization with his nearest counterparts, noting that Kaczynski had already made his initial trips to Berlin and Kiev. Yushchenko's two-day visit had an especially broad agenda, Handzlik reported. The Ukrainian president briefed Kaczynski on his efforts to revitalize GUAM at the Kiev summit, and regretted that other commitments (including the upcoming papal visit to Poland) would prevent Kaczynski from attending. In a last-minute reversal, Kaczynski made a surprise visit to the summit. The visit was portrayed in the Polish Media as supporting GUAM as an alternative to the Commonwealth of Independent States, which may further complicate Polish Russian ties.

13. (C) Although convinced of the need for further diversification of energy supplies, Kaczynski was less optimistic than Yushchenko concerning the immediate prospects for the Odessa-Brody-Gdansk pipeline project, Handzlik said, while the Ukrainian leader appeared bullish about possible U.S. investment and Kazakh participation. Both leaders agreed that greater infrastructure and staffing are needed to reduce long waits at the Polish-Ukrainian border. Yushchenko and Kaczynski also discussed strategy in support of their joint bid to host the 2012 European football championship, Handzlik mentioned.

14. (C) The Polish and Ukrainian presidents took part in a solemn ceremony May 13 in the southeastern Polish town of Pawlokoma, marking a 1945 massacre there of Ukrainian civilians by Polish units (part of the bloody wartime history of conflict between Polish and Ukrainian forces). Handzlik acknowledged that negotiations on the ceremony had been "difficult" because of sensitivities on both sides, but stated that the Ukrainians had appreciated Kaczynski's recognition that crimes had also been committed by the Polish side. The Polish MFA's Ewa Figel, senior desk officer for Eastern Europe, suggested, however, that many Ukrainians believed that the Polish gesture fell short of an explicit admission of culpability and that some -- including some Poles -- were disappointed that the Polish president had not demonstrated greater courage in promoting national reconciliation.

15. (C) Handzlik reported that Yushchenko had told Kaczynski that he "favored" an Orange coalition for the next Ukrainian government and that he expected to be able to achieve that in the days ahead. Kaczynski made clear to Yushchenko his preference for such a coalition and offered his support if he could be helpful in any way. Figel cautioned, though, that Yushchenko may have been telling Kaczynski what he thought the Polish president wanted to hear, as she understands that a coalition with the Party of Regions remains very much in play. Figel said that she and other GOP officials believe that an Orange coalition may depend on whether or not Tymoshenko will accept a position other than prime minister, such as parliamentary speaker.

16. (C) Recalling that Kaczynski's discussions with German

president Koehler had been among the high points of the Polish president's trip to Berlin, Handzlik indicated that the two leaders appear to be establishing a personal connection, which he attributed in large part to Kohler's evident efforts to reach out to Kaczynski. Koehler was well prepared to address the Baltic gas pipeline issue, Handzlik said, taking exception to Polish Defense Minister Sikorski's allusions to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (which Kaczynski did not completely disavow) while seeking to allay Polish concerns. Parenthetically, Handzlik confirmed that Polish Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz had displeased Kaczynski by suggesting that Poland might participate in the Baltic project and that PM advisor Ryszard Schnepf had been fired to take the rap for the PM.

17. (C) Whether out of conviction or interest in currying favor with Kaczynski, Koehler reportedly insisted that he would defend Poland against charges of anti-Semitism and intolerance stemming from the new governing coalition with Self-Defense and the League of Polish Families. Europe needs moral leadership, Koehler reportedly told Kaczynski, and the German president is prepared to speak out when necessary. Alluding to gay rights protesters who greeted him during his appearance at Humboldt University in Berlin, Kaczynski assured Koehler that he did not want to take away anyone's rights, but he could not permit threats to family values, such as same-sex marriage.

18. (C) Comment: Handzlik portrayed his president as a leader growing in confidence through these exchanges with his counterparts, and decisively strengthening his control over Polish foreign policy. He suggested that newly-appointed Foreign Minister Anna Fotyga, a long-time Kaczynski confidante, will offer good counsel, but ultimately serve as Kaczynski's "right hand," implementing whatever policy course he sets. Handzlik confirmed that Presidential Chancellery head Andrzej Urbanski's position as national security advisor will be made permanent ("why would he give up that power?," Handzlik asked rhetorically). From now on, "everything will be decided here," Handzlik stated baldly -- an assertion so far not refuted by anyone in or out of government.

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